

Massive increase in police violence across UK

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3 November 2018

Incidences of police brutality have risen rapidly in the UK in the last year. According to the statistics supplied by the police themselves, violence and deaths at the hands of police officers have both seen a marked increase.

Figures from a Metropolitan Police online database show that just in London, the Met used violence against individuals a staggering 41,477 times in the five month period between April and August this year.

The data reveal that methods of force, including handcuffs, batons and tear gas, as well as attack dogs, Tasers and guns, were used an average of 270 times a day just in the capital. This compares to an already appallingly high 151 times a day in the corresponding period last year—a 79 percent increase in incidents of police brutality.

Episodes of police violence from just these five months are almost on a par with the total number of incidents from the whole of last year (April 2017-April 2018), when there were 62,153 occasions of force being used by the London police.

Many of the incidents relate violent police methods such as using pressure points to restrain and handcuff individuals. However, in the same period, police officers also fired or aimed Tasers at suspects 2,663 times and trained real firearms on suspects 591 times in London—an average of nearly four times a day.

Since last year, police firearms operations have risen by nearly 20 percent nationally, with some areas seeing an increase of 53 percent. There were around 18,700 police firearms operations across the UK in 2017-18.

The London boroughs in which police violence has been most widespread are Westminster, which saw 2,837 incidences of police violence between April and August, then Lambeth (2,571), Brent (2,489), Southwark (2,000) and Hackney (1,739).

With the exception of Westminster, which is the location of important landmarks such as the Houses of

Parliament and the Queen's residence at Buckingham Palace, these boroughs are predominantly working-class areas with high levels of poverty, deprivation and unemployment.

In these boroughs, police harassment, assault and abuse are daily facts of life, often with terrible and tragic consequences for the working-class inhabitants.

The case of Julian Cole, a young black man who was violently restrained and arrested by police outside a nightclub in Bedford is a prime example. During the arrest in 2013, in which he was forcefully restrained and dragged unconscious to a police van, Cole suffered a broken neck and serious injuries to his spine at the hands of three police officers.

The serious injuries he suffered during the police assault left him in a permanent vegetative state, requiring 24-hour care.

An Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) disciplinary panel, which was set up to investigate the circumstances of Cole's arrest, found that the three officers who restrained him, Hannah Ross, Nicholas Oates and Sanjeev Kalyan, had committed gross misconduct and lied about the events of the night. They had falsely claimed that Cole had walked to the police van and been "chatty" during their journey to the police station, when in fact his neck had been broken and he had gone into cardiac arrest long before that.

The officers were also found to have committed misconduct by not carrying out any of the basic welfare checks on Cole after he had been restrained.

Rather than being prosecuted for the violent assault, which left the young man permanently and seriously disabled, the three officers were merely dismissed from their posts in the police service last week, with the Crown Prosecution Service finding that no criminal action had occurred.

For others, encounters with police end even more tragically than did that of Julian Cole. According to the

annual statistics compiled by IOPC, in the 2017-2018 financial year 283 people lost their lives following contact with police.

Of these deaths, 23 occurred in or following police custody, 57 were apparent suicides following custody and 29 related to road traffic incidents. There were also four police shootings (three of which were related to terrorism) and 170 unspecified “other” deaths at the hands of the police.

The IOPC figures show that more people were killed after contact with police in the 2017-2018 period than in any other year in the last decade.

This escalation of police violence has come amidst calls from senior police officials to ramp up the militarisation of the police. Citing the threat of terrorism, Simon Chesterman, the armed policing lead for the National Police Chiefs’ Council, called in March for the routine arming of all frontline police officers with Tasers, declaring, “if an officer wants to carry it and they can meet the standard, they should be allowed to carry it.”

Chesterman went further still in May, advocating the rolling out of real firearms among police officers, supposedly to counter the terrorism threat. In a paper prepared by Chesterman for a meeting of police chiefs, he called for the routine arming of frontline constables with guns, stating his apparent concern that it could take too long for fully trained armed officers to respond to a terrorist attack in rural areas.

Much of the coverage of this increase in police violence in the bourgeois media has focused on the fact that police brutality disproportionately targets black people and other ethnic minorities. Black people in London were involved in 39 percent of incidents of police violence since April 2018, despite making up only 13 percent of the capital’s population.

While racism plays a role in police violence, the media’s focus on race obscures the fundamental class character of police brutality.

The militarisation of the police and the proliferation of police violence is not the result of a few bad apples within the police force, but flows necessarily from the nature of the capitalist state as an instrument of class repression. The police exist to defend the political and economic system of capitalism, a system of immense inequality and brutality.

This turn to increased violence and repression must

be seen in the context of rising class antagonisms worldwide and the global crisis of capitalist rule. To combat the growing unrest of the working class, governments across the world are increasingly acquiring an authoritarian character and strengthening the repressive powers of the intelligence agencies and an increasingly militarised police force.

This repressive apparatus, which is justified as a proportionate response to terrorist attacks, is primarily aimed at combating the political mobilisation of the working class, through violence, intimidation and censorship.

The last few years have seen the massive growth of censorship measures across Europe and the United States. In the name of combating “disinformation” and “fake news”, governments across the world are introducing legislation seriously curtailing freedom of speech.

In addition to targeting left-wing, antiwar and socialist websites, the *World Socialist Web Site* among the most affected, internet censorship measures have also been taken against popular social media accounts exposing and denouncing police violence. Facebook recently deleted numerous pages by groups opposing and publicising incidents of police violence such as *Police the Police*, *Cop Block* and *Filming Cops*.



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